

[This interview is also available in video format, filmed by Brian Brown. The interview was transcribed by Tom Williams with assistance from Bryon Hoerner.]

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Interviewer: Hi, I'm Bryon Hoerner, Curator of Collections for the Estes Park Museum. It's Tuesday, November 12, 2013. I'm at the Detterline residence interviewing long time Park Ranger and local climber, Dr. Jim Detterline for the Estes Valley Mountaineering Oral History Project, a joint effort between the Estes Valley Library and the Estes Park Museum.

All right, if you could tell us your full name, to start off with please.

Jim Detterline: I'm Dr. Jim Detterline.

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Jim Detterline: I was born in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, which is in Schuylkill County up in the northeastern part of the state. It's part of the coal region, so my first mountains weren't the nice alpine peaks of the Estes Park area. My first peaks were piles of coal slag and my first rivers were bright orange from the acid flowing out of the mine shafts into the local streams.

Interviewer: Growing up in coal country then, how were you first exposed to climbing?

Jim Detterline: I would have to credit that to my father, Reverend Milton Detterline Jr. My father had a real interest in the outdoors and wanted to share that with my two brothers and I. So he would take an entire month off from his job as a pastor with the United Church of Christ every summer and he would take us to a different part of the country. We would visit natural things and historical things and other points of interests that weren't exactly amusement parks. He had a couple of rules with these trips. One rule was that we never slept in a hotel or an RV; it had to be in a tent or underneath the stars. The only time he broke that rule was on a trip to the Everglades where I was chasing my brother out of a tent and I broke my left arm. That was the only time I got to sleep in something other than a tent. Dad also introduced us to winter camping and hiking along the Appalachian Trail. He didn't really have any knowledge of technical climbing, he always wanted to. So that part of it I didn't get into until I went to Moravian College for my Bachelor of Science Degree. They had an outdoor club there with some fantastically talented people who were teaching climbing and that's where I got my climbing start as a freshman in college.

Interviewer: Where was your first climb then and who was it with?

Jim Detterline: My first climb was in September of 1974 and it was with the Moravian College Grotto and Outing Club on a small cliff in Eastern Pennsylvania, not far from the Delaware River. It was made out of red shale, a 120' cliff. I guess my first climb was on a 60' wall there called the Practice Face at Ralph Stover State Park.

Interviewer: Did you know right away, did you enjoy climbing?

Jim Detterline: I really enjoyed climbing from the start. My whole reason for trying climbing at all, and I also tried scuba diving that same year, was to broaden my outdoor skills. I wanted to become a field biologist originally, and I wanted to be able to go wherever any of the animals might be found or living. So rock climbing seemed to be a natural extension of the long backpacking trips and some of the little scrambling trips that I had been doing since I was a child. Right away I really enjoyed it for just being its own thing, because it challenged every muscle in your body and a few in your mind.

Interviewer: How did you progress as a climber? Did you have a mentor or did you have a friend that you went out with a lot?

Jim Detterline: There were a couple of people that were associated with that club that were not college students. It was actually a community club; the college had the wisdom to allow people from outside the college to join this particular club. It brought some real expertise into the club. One of the major players there was a fellow by the name of Eugene A. Genay and Genay and his friends, Genay was the leader of them all and he'd actually led them on some early big wall climbs in Yosemite Valley. So these guys had some tremendously developed rock climbing talents and also later on when I got into ice climbing, these guys were also among the first of the local ice climbers in Eastern Pennsylvania.

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Interviewer: Were you drawn to that traveling around and climbing as a part of that group.

Jim Detterline: I was but it was a little difficult. At that time in college it was all I could do to just pay for my tuition and I would really scrap just to go on these climbing trips that the Moravian College Grotto and Outing Club offered. They would do trips to Seneca Rocks, West Virginia several times a year. Then there were those members of the club that I really got along with greatly and we started doing our own trips as well, stated going further afield. That's eventually what brought me here to Rocky Mountain National Park in 1979 after I had graduated from school.

Interviewer: So it was after university that you made it out to Rocky. Did you come for a job or did you come for a climbing trip first?

Jim Detterline:

Well, I graduated from college in '78. I started climbing in '74, graduated in '78, I'd done trips all over the East Coast and I'd never been out west before. In 1979 I was accepted to start graduate school as a master's candidate working with the poisonous snakes at the, it's called the University of Memphis now, back then it was Memphis State University in Memphis, Tennessee. I had two choices, what I could do with that immediate time right before I went to school. I had an offer to go to England to the Lake District and instruct rock climbing for a YMCA camp. I would hardly make any money with that, I'd come back essentially pretty broke as far as starting school in Memphis. Or I could do a few more months of construction work and then take a month off and go visit some friends who were living out here in the west. The major friend of mine who was living here in the west was a guy by the name Bill Webster. Bill worked for the Rocky Mountain National Park Backcountry Office. Bill was a very avid climber; he was a guy that I really enjoyed learning to climb from. I guess if there was one person who was a mentor in those later days, it was Bill. Bill had written a guide book to Seneca Rocks, West Virginia and he'd moved out here and was doing a whole lot of alpine climbs in the park. So three of us from Pennsylvania drove all of the way out to Colorado and in two short weeks Bill Webster introduced me to alpine climbing with an assent of the Petit Grepon in Rocky Mountain National Park. He introduced me to aid climbing; he introduced me to The Diamond and Longs Peak of Rocky Mountain National Park. He introduced me to the works of Ed Abbey, the writings of Ed Abbey, and also the Life of a Park Ranger. I was really enchanted with this, with this entire thing. My first attempt on Longs Peak was with Bill and we were trying to do a route on The Diamond called the "Black Dagger". I had the first pitch and Bill was kind of misreading the guide book. He said, "Well, why don't you take this first one as a warm up, I think it's only supposed to be 5.5". Ok, it was really pretty intimidating out there, it was at a higher elevation than I had ever been in my life and it was an incredible amount of exposure. As I took up off this really steep wall, it seemed like all the hand/foot holds there were about the thickness of a quarter on edge or something like that and it was pretty scary and difficult to get protection in. And, all the time I had in the back of my mind, "I feel like I'm going to fall at any moment, it's tremendously difficult but I can't fall or this will be a real disgrace on a 5.5. I must really be feeling the altitude or something." So finally Bill yelled that I was out of rope, it was really supposed to be a short pitch and it wasn't. It was a full rope length, a full 150' plus and I just found some nest of slings there that I clipped into and called for him on belay and the whole way he was yelling, he says, "Where did you go here, he says you freed the aid." And it turned out that the pitch that I had done was actually possibly the second assent of Roger Briggs' free assent of that particular pitch on the bottom of the Black Dagger Route. So then from there, Bill took over three pitches of aid; he was much more experienced with that. And then we ran into a

lightning storm that was just horrible and still had at least two, maybe three pitches to go to Table Ledge where one could reasonably get away from the difficulties. We decided to go ahead and rappel off and during the rappel I dropped a haul bag down Field's Chimney, we had to rappel down that. I knocked a rock on poor Bill, he got a couple of stiches in his head. It was a real epic but I had a real new appreciation for Longs Peak and more than just a fear of it. I wanted to come back and I made a pact then and there with myself that I would be back to Longs Peak and that I wanted to climb a route on The Diamond first before I would climb any other route on Longs Peak.

11:10

Interviewer: So then what eventually brought you back ?

Jim Detterline: I came back to try The Diamond and that's what brought me back here. I tried it a couple of times and in the meantime, when I was finishing up my Master's Candidacy at Memphis State, I found out that they had a Park Ranger training program run by Dr. Bill Dwyer, a real top notch seasonal park ranger and also a psychologist who specialized in law enforcement emergency services type of topics. I took this course, I'm glad I didn't find out about this until near the end of my program or I probably wouldn't have graduated in biology. I got a job right away with the Park Service. They were looking for somebody with climbing skills and they hired me at Dinosaur National Monument on the Utah side. I was there for two years. And then I started working Rocky Mountain National Park in 1984. I wasn't successful on The Diamond; I had two or three more attempts that failed due to poor weather. One attempt actually failed because my partner got ill. We had set up our hammocks on the face and we were sleeping on that steep face and during the night he has his situated so that there was a drop of water coming down on his head, it was kind of like the old Chinese water torture. So poor Duane Kitzis woke up in the morning, and told me, "Doc, I don't feel too good, do you mind if we rappel down?" I said, "Why didn't you just move your hammock in the night?" It just not the kind of place to do that, so I ended coming back in 1985 and then I finally got my first summit on The Diamond with Duane Kitzis. We did that via the Casual Route and among my next dozen climbs on Longs Peak, the majority of them were via The Diamond again. Different routes.

Interviewer: Where was the ranger training program located that you participated in?

Jim Detterline: The ranger training program was on campus at the University of Memphis, inside the city of Memphis, Tennessee. It was really good law enforcement training; Memphis is certainly well equipped with law enforcement experiences. They had a shotgun training that I remember where there were two fellows from the Memphis Police Department. They started their little course in shot gunning by one guy just grabbed a shot gun and sawed a target in two, through it at the other guy and the other

guy said, "This is going to be your best friend, the shot gun." He said, "This is an incredibly effective weapon, I know because I've been shot two times with this, twice by my wife." So it was a very interesting course with a very southern redneck flair to some of the training. [laughter] True story.

14:35

Interviewer: What was it that attracted you to the ranger training program? Was it the law enforcement part of it, was that an interest to you as well or was it more just to be outdoors, the outdoor part of it?

Jim Detterline: The law enforcement part was important to me because I've always felt a real sense of preservation as far as keeping our great wilderness lands, our great wild lands as they are. As far as keeping species intact and surviving and keeping a balance and letting things happen as nature intended it to be. With law enforcement, it's a tool for helping to keep these things healthy. Most of law enforcement is not really beating down somebody's door and going in there with a bunch of weapons to arrest them or something. Most of law enforcement is actually educating people, letting them know that first of all this is an act that we don't do and this is why that we don't do this particular act. "I know that you want to be with all of us in helping to save this and so we need your cooperation". Usually that works just fine and if you need to take it up to different levels, law enforcement gives you the tools to take care of people who need, say more than the basic education. However, the real reason that I got involved in park rangering was twofold; first of all when I was only eight years old on that annual family camping trip, we went to Kentucky for a month and while we were at Natural Bridges State Park, they were running a special program called the "Kentucky Junior Naturalist Badge", it was kind of like a Junior Ranger Program in today's parks, today's National Parks. I was only eight years old and they didn't really encourage eight year olds to take this even though they said that was their limit, but they let me take the program. So I signed up for the Kentucky Junior Naturalist Badge and it was a vigorous three days of training and learning about the natural history of Kentucky State Parks and at the end of that three days I was one of the few people that passed and I was the youngest person ever to get the award. They gave me a nice little patch they sewed on my parka. I was also the first Pennsylvanian ever to get that award. So I've had a real respect for what park rangers do after, especially after going through that training but also from that part of my life where we visited a lot of parks.

The other commitment to the National Park Service comes from an unfortunate misadventure of mine while climbing in Grand Teton on Grand Teton and that was in 1980. I'd climbed the Grand Teton in 1979 and I had done its simplest route, the Owens Spaulding which is still a respectable mountaineering route. I'd actually taken a Hell's Angel motorcyclist up there with me, a guy who wanted to learn how to climb

and needed a partner. But I really wanted to climb the North Face, it was one of the great north faces of North America comparable with the great north faces of the Alps. The Matterhorn for instance, the Eiger, Grandes Jorasses, and I wanted to do the Grand Teton of Wyoming. So I went back to do the North Face with a really favorite partner of mine, Paul Bolik and we ended up getting caught by a first storm of winter, at the end of August. Came in from our blind side and we were caught 500' from the summit hanging on the face in the storm. We were 2,000 feet from the glacier. We only had a half of rack of gear, we were traveling very light. We didn't have a whole lot of food, we had a handful of banana bits and we had a half a peanut butter sandwich to share between the both of us. We had one rope that was chopped because it had got hit by a rock. We had got hit by lightning while we were trying to climb up there in the early part of the storm. We kept trying to climb out but the whole face iced over and every time we tried to climb out we'd just fall. We knew we didn't have enough gear to get to the bottom so we were just trying and hoping our energy was going to hold up.

19:20

Towards the end of the ordeal, let's see, we were out there five days, four nights out there on the face. The Grand Teton National Park Rescue Team decided to attempt a rescue. They couldn't get their people to the summit because the weather was still so bad that there was a little window in the weather which they were able to get a helicopter as far as the top of the Underhill Ridge on Grand Teton. They dropped off a small team of rangers who went up close to the summit and extended a 500' line down to us. They reeled this line down to us with Ranger Renny Jackson [Reynold Jackson] on it who won the, was awarded the Medal of Valor for his actions along with other members of the rescue team. I later was awarded that same metal when I was a Park Ranger here, so I guess I'm the first person that have caused one as well as earned one. They put all three of us together on one single line, 500', and reeled us up to the summit. It was such a terrific job that they actually broke three of the teeth on the winch trying to get us there. When they finally did get us up we were pinned down by a lightning storm, an intense part of it for about 45 minutes where I was sure somebody was going to get struck. The lightning just hit every single object around us. It was a really great ordeal and out of that whole thing I got a whole lot of respect for rescue. Prior to that point I'd been kind of a cocky young climber and I always thought that anybody who needed a rescue must have really screwed up bad in some way. I didn't really have a real big opinion of people who were getting involved in rescues because we often don't see the people who are out on that sharp edge. Well here's a top notch crew of climbers that are doing rescue and the biggest thing about them was that they are total strangers. They didn't know me from Adam, yet they put their lives on the line to come out and save my partner and I. Cause we were certainly on our way to having a

disaster or a death out of this. So I had a tremendous respect for rescue and when I found this opportunity to join the Park Service I wanted to get back in and give back and rescue who what had been given to me.

Interviewer: So you said you worked at Dinosaur National Monument for a couple of years and then did you end up in Rocky Mountain National Park after that?

Jim Detterline: That's correct. I was Backcountry Ranger, I really enjoyed my years at Dinosaur, I did a whole lot of first ascents in the desert, on desert towers that had not been climbed before. I got to really work not only with the Park Rescue Team but also with the local county rescue team and I did a lot of training for their rescue teams. I had some very unique law enforcement experiences, my backcountry patrols also included rafting on the Green River. I had a great time, I had hard time leaving when the job opportunity came up at Rocky Mountain National Park,

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but there was a ranger working here at the time by the name of Charlie Logan. Charlie was also a real "Longs Peaker", as we call people that really enjoy Longs Peak. He'd been up the Diamond. He'd done the North Face of the Matterhorn; he was kind of a hero to me. Wild looking fellow, real long hair and a real flowing blond mustache, real cheerful guy. Charlie insisted that he hire me for the Thompson River District of Rocky Mountain National Park cause he really needed somebody on his staff that was a climber. He had a couple of climbers on his staff and my lead climbing abilities were, they were a bit greater than what he already had so he wanted to have a real lead climber on his staff. So that was my first position was as a Seasonal Ranger in the Thompson River District which is the area around the Bear Lake Road. I did that for two years and then when my immediate boss, Kurt Oliver moved south to the Wild Basin District which includes Longs Peak area, he asked me to come with him and become a Longs Peak Ranger. I got to work for the incredible and famous Billy Westbay, renown climber who had done the first one day ascent of El Cap [El Capitan] in Yosemite National Park. He'd also been a local guide and done a number of routes of renown around Longs Peak, including the Dunn-Westbay Route on The Diamond. It was a thrill to work with Billy and get the chance to climb with him. I was only at Longs Peak one year with Billy when Billy left the Park Service as a climbing ranger at that point, we had no permanent climbing rangers at Rocky Mountain National Park. So Billy went and left for greener pastures, worked for a ski area year round. He had been a ski patrolman in the winter anyway. So the following year Stewart Snider worked part of the

year as the new supervisor, but he got a permanent job and all of a sudden, part way through my second season at Longs Peak, I became the Longs Peak Supervisory Climbing Ranger, following the long tradition of many famous ranger climbers since Ernie Field in 1938. I was a bit awe struck at having this tremendous responsibility and also this heritage to uphold. But it became just a real important part of my life and it became my persona. I became the Longs Peak Supervisory Climbing Ranger for a period of 21 years I was the supervisor. 21, 22 years, something like that, longer than anybody in the history of the park. I then became the first permanent person to have that job. The changed it into a permanent position so I was the first permanent Longs Peak Ranger ever.

Interviewer: You mentioned a little bit there about the tradition and the heritage of climbers, climbing rangers at Longs Peak and Estes Park itself has kind of some tradition a long history of the climbers. What was your sense of the climbing community in Estes Park when you got here? What kind of interactions did you have with some of those guys that maybe had been here for a few years already?

Jim Detterline: As I mentioned before, I started coming here in 1979 and I started making this a regular part of my vacation route until I actually moved here to do seasonal work in summers starting in 1984. I got to meet a lot of the local climbers bit by bit, very slowly, and I was kind of awe struck by these guys because these are the guys and gals who were on the headlines in Climbing Magazine, in Mountain Magazine published in England and in Summit Magazine and in the newly formed Rock and Ice Magazine. I'd heard of a lot of these people and they were legends to me. I was really awe struck by them and getting to know and work with people, for instance like Billy Westbay, I really tried to soak up as much as I could of their knowledge. What I learned from them was very valuable both in the obvious stuff which would be local geography, but also in some of the techniques that they used to be successful in the mountains around here.

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Interviewer: Can you think of any maybe one particular thing, maybe a story or a climb or something that you did when you worked for Billy that really kind of stuck with you for the rest of your life? Something you might have incorporated in your own climbing or rangering?

Jim Detterline: There's a number of climbs with Billy that are unforgettable and also some of the rescues with Billy. He was really a great rescue ranger, he was a great law enforcement officer, he had Federal Law Enforcement Commission just like I did. All in all, when it came back to basics, he was a great climber. Remember when you have climbing ranger that climbing always comes first. That's something that the National Park Service has never really been able to stomach, but that's the way it is. Billy was a climber's climber. He was well known for his climbs on The Diamond and

he really enjoyed being on the big walls. He wanted to climb with me on The Diamond, he wanted to climb with all of his staff, and not all of them went up The Diamond with him because they weren't all quite at that level. I had the privilege of joining Billy for an ascent of Pervertical Sanctuary and I don't believe he'd done Pervertical Sanctuary at that point in his career. So he kept wanting to try routes he hadn't tried and he felt comfortable enough with me to try it and I felt honored that he would do that. We left from the old Chasm Meadows cabin and only five hours later we were on the summit of Longs Peak. The entire way up, there were several interesting things. First of all, Billy was just pushing the entire way, I'd say, "I think I'm at the belay, I see a nest of slings and a comfortable place where we can hang out." "Naw, you've got 25 more feet of rope, keep climbing". And he'd have me run the rope out and then just put some cams in or some stoppers or whatever was there in some ridiculous hanging place and then we'd just keep on climbing up the wall like that, taking turns with the leads. I remember on one particular lead, Billy was kind of in an overhanging section, he had a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, Billy was a big smoker. Unfortunately that was his demise later on. But he had a nice fist jam with that huge hand of his jammed in the crack there and he's hanging on one hand free and he just pulls a cigarette out of his mouth casually with the other and he says, "I think I'm going to have to give up this smoking sooner or later, it's just impacting my climbing." Then he put it in his mouth and just climbed through the crux. He had one of the 5.10 cruxes, he had the longer of the two, and he only put in one piece of protection, I don't remember what that was anymore, in the entire 40' section. So we just kept running up The Diamond like that. The other remarkable thing about that experience that I will not forget is that that's the first and only time that I've been body belayed on The Diamond, which is essentially the old technique, where you run the rope around your waist and from the friction of the rope around your waist you are expected to hold your partner and not only a fall from below if you're seconding, but also on a lead fall. Billy was very capable with that and I never really had any qualms about being belayed like that by Billy Westbay, but I don't know that I would have wanted to have had that experience with anybody else.

Interviewer: When you got into climbing in the mid to late '70s, what was the gear situation like at the time?

Jim Detterline: I stated in 1974, at that time the climbing community in North America had just switched over from pitons into these new things called chocks or cams. At that point there weren't any nice mechanical friends or anything like that. At that point it was just some very crudely shaped little rectangular chocks and also we had hexes. So we were mainly using those but we still had a lot of throwbacks to the piton generation and the guys that I learned from taught me a lot about pitoning because you'd be trusting pitons even if you didn't put them in yourself while you were

leading. There might be some that were fixed in position, maybe in the belay and you certainly needed to know how they went in there so you understood as to whether or not these things were any good. Some of the things that we, some of the ways we climbed was we would have our gear arranged on the left side if you were right handed. The reason for that was in the immediate era preceding mine with the pitons, you needed your right hand free for the piton hammer so your left hand could pick up the gear off your left side. I still climb like that, it's part of my habit. We were using EBs and they were hard rubber shoes and those were pretty new. Prior to that the climbing shoes they had were, they called them "rock climbing shoes" but they were just lighter hiking boots is what they mainly looked like. I think these things gave us a great advantage in pushing on into the next standards. I rose pretty rapidly, my first year I was climbing 5.7, my next year I was climbing 5.9 and I was starting to lead already too. So that was pretty fast for that era.

11:05

Interviewer: I want to sort of shift gears here, you mentioned about your epic on the Grand Teton and your respect for the rescuers and that and that being one of the reasons you got into rangering. You were involved in search and rescue from the start as a ranger. How have you seen the search and rescue change over the years that you have been involved in it?

Jim Detterline: I did a few rescues before I was involved with the Park Service or before I was rescued myself. I ended up becoming involved in over 1,200 different search and rescue incidents, missions over the years. Very minor things to very major things. The cornerstone of search and rescue hasn't really been the equipment; although you might think that the emphasis is on that and certainly a lot emphasis and research is on the equipment because that's the one thing that we can really change about search and rescue to make things safer. But the real emphasis in search and rescue is always been on the qualities of the rescuer. I've seen some changes there. Originally the way rescue started, it was an informal kind of arrangement. If you were somebody who lived in the mountains and somebody else who lived in the mountains was in need, you helped out your fellow mountaineer. That adage was carried over to technical climbing. If there's a fellow mountain climber that's in need, you will come to their aid. People would even discuss bad karma for instance if you didn't help somebody else out. So it was just a really important part of the game to be able to help rescue other parties and to be pretty self-sufficient yourself and be able to rescue your own party or yourself if you needed to. So people who were doing rescues were climbers first. Over the years I have seen a gradual shift where people learn about rescue first, technical alpine type rescue and technical rock rescue. They'll learn those skills first before they're actually climbers. It's changed a lot of the dynamics of the rescue team. The other dynamic that I've really seen has been from the overhead, which is the

part of the team that controls what going on out in the field. A very necessary part of the team that's kind of behind the scenes that most people don't even realize exists. But they've created an adage that says, "The rescuer comes first". We always knew that if we didn't take care of our own personal safety, this would be a bad thing in several different ways, not just because we were getting ourselves hurt, but because then we weren't available to finish our mission. Our mission may be dangerous, in fact mountain rescue is inherently dangerous, you can never really take all the danger out of a mountain rescue mission. But it doesn't mean that you can't figure out how to successfully carry out a mission without getting yourself or anybody else hurt or killed. That's the beauty of both climbing and rescue in that both of them require brains as well as brawn.

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So my big thing through all these years has always been to take these big situations and take them apart and figure out, this is the situation the way it is. Alright, sure it's dangerous but how can we go ahead and take this situation and carry the situation out in a safe manner? What can we do? If you think about most of these things you can come up with the thing. Today it seems like the adage is, "The rescuer comes first, the victim or patient will be somebody who's kind of on the outside". I would always tell my patients that, "Hey, welcome aboard, you are now the most important part of the rescue team because your attitude, even if you are just stuck tied down in this litter here, your attitude is going to determine how well the rest of the team is going to do. So we really need your help, you're now the most important member of our team. You can help with your own rescue even if it's just concentrating on slowing your breathing down a little bit and just stay with us cause we really want to get you out of there. But you've got to help us." So that was always my attitude. Now the attitude is that the patient or victim is somebody who's more on the outside. We look after for the rescuers first and if somebody feels uncomfortable, maybe just cause it is a little too cold out there or something like that, it's ok to go ahead to turn around a go home. It doesn't really seem to take any thought as far as like if you do that, what about my fellow rescuers, what effect is that going to have on somebody else? Isn't there any way else I can figure out how to get around this? Sure there's times we got to turn around but it just seems like it's more of an excuse now a day and I'd like to see anybody doing climbing rescue and alpine rescue be somebody who is well versed in those disciplines first. Because if you can't take care of your own ass up there, you shouldn't be out there trying to take care of somebody else, cause then you are going to get both yourselves killed and you will be coming home alone then.

Interviewer: You mentioned taking large complicated situations and breaking it down kind of piece by piece. Do you have an example of that you can share with us, of an incident that you were involved in?

Jim Detterline: Oh, I've got a lot of examples of that, because that was my specialty. Whenever things were at their worst, I wanted that situation because I liked the opportunity of figuring out how to go ahead and turn that around. One of those situations I had that I was in charge of was where we had a fellow who had broken his leg at the top of The Trough on Longs Peak. That's in the hiking route, The Keyhole. So he's not really far from the summit, you'd have to go over The Narrows and then up the Homestretch to get there, but he's a long way from the trailhead. We never really had advanced helicopter capabilities at Rocky Mountain National Park. I just thought about this situation and where he was and I thought, "This is a really good opportunity in which the fastest way down maybe to go up. What we are going to do is we are going to go ahead and fly a team on to the summit, have them lower us a litter and set up a 3:1 mechanical advantage for z-rig raising system and bring this guy up to the summit and then have him flown out. We've got a real small window to do this in." We got this entire thing, once we got the crew on the summit flown up there; we got this entire operation carried out in about 45 minutes. When we flew this guy out the snowstorm was just starting. All of us on the rescue team walked down in a blizzard, but we got our patient out of there in time. So it was a complicated bunch of circumstances. For my part of it I ended up working on the medical at the scene with this guy and also I ended up orchestrating where different people would go. I also was making the call as far as how many people we needed and what kind of resources. But then I actually ran around back and forth between the scene and the summit to go ahead and help with the raising team up top as well.

19:33

Interviewer: You said over 1,200 incidents that you were involved in as a ranger.

Jim Detterline: That's correct.

Interviewer: How did your experience as a rescue professional translate or effect your personal climbing?

Jim Detterline: I would go back to try climbs where there may have been a rescue or even a death and you can't really go back there without thinking about what you've been through. I think it made me more careful. I think it made me a better, more attentive climber.

20:14

Interviewer: Seeing and being involved in the incidents and accidents and that, was there ever a time where your personal motivation as a climber maybe flagged a little bit because of that? Did you ever question why you kept

climbing personally after seeing these incidents and being involved in them?

Jim Detterline:

I always felt like climbing was therapy for some of these rescues too. You had to go back and get out there and instead of getting on the horse, get on the mountain. I remember one particular incident where we had a guy suffering, it turned out he was suffering from altitude sickness. We didn't know this at the time, we just knew that he was a guy who shouldn't have been up that high on the mountain because he wasn't really technically competent. We had contacted him earlier and I'd actually written him a ticket to discourage him from going further up the mountain. He had illegally camped and just wanted to do everything we could to turn this guy around and here he is on the mountain after my partner and I had come up the east face on a really lousy, snowy, yet summer day. It was just the lousiest weather and the peak [Longs Peak] was in technical conditions, the hiking route was not really a walk, it was a technical climb. This guy is just trying to get around up there and he's on his way up. It was difficult to communicate with him, he was a citizen of Japan and so his native language was Japanese and he was ok with English but not really very good with it. So we had a little bit of trouble trying to communicate with him. But we made him understand that "No, it's pretty bad up there, we need to turn around. You can stay with us". So he kind of stood with us but he didn't, he kept insisting of wanting to be out in front on the way back down. We had to correct him several times. Then at one point he was off route and he started down climbing a crack towards an area on The Ledges part of the Keyhole Route where there's some metal bars. All of a sudden he got himself stuck with his pack in this crack and he pushed himself out of it and when he pushed himself out he hit the ledge below. I saw his ankle roll

22:43 [End of Part B.]

[C].

00:00

and he went cartwheeling off that little ledge 450' to his death. My partner and I watched him bounce just to try to figure out, well ok, we know he's hitting right here, this is a mechanism injury but after about a dozen bounces, I was having trouble seeing the guy anymore. I'm thinking, "I just be better able to figure out where this guy is because he's pretty small". So we went and down climbed to this guy and he of course was dead from massive trauma, particularly open fractures of the scull. I ended up being on the operation to investigate that incident. It was the easiest investigation I've ever done because I saw the whole thing. To go ahead and get the body out of there, in the process I took the man's camera and developed the film in it. It turned out that he had actually been to the summit already. So he must have been suffering some altitude sickness

that made him turn around and be going the wrong way back up towards the summit. So I think that he was probably on his way to another place anyway. We were able to correct him a few times but it wasn't enough. Every time I go past that particular area on the mountain, even if on a hike and I'll be with some other friends that are all excited. Maybe they are up on Longs for the first time, that I've had the privilege of taking them up there. I always get a little giddy when I have other people that I am responsible for going over that particular spot.

Interviewer: Let's talk about Longs Peak, the mountain a little bit. You're the Supervisory Climbing Ranger up there for numerous years; you've also hold the current record for the most summits which is how many again?

Jim Detterline: Well I'm up to 406 summits; don't intend to give up any time soon. It's nice weather right now, we can take off right now and forget the rest of the interview, climb up there. [laughter]

Interviewer: What's the attraction to you about Longs Peak?

Jim Detterline: In the very beginning, the attraction of Longs Peak was purely from a physical standpoint. Can I climb this big alpine wall? It requires a huge physical effort and a very big mental effort with all the exposure up there. As I got to know Longs Peak however, I realized that this was a mountain that had something for everyone. It had a hiking route on it for people who don't like technical climbs or much more than a little exposure, for some of them it is a lot of exposure. It has climbs that are easy rock, it has climbs that are moderate rock, it has ice climbs. It has some great ski runs on it, which I wouldn't recommend to anybody unless you are really into that. I had my chance to ski the north face and survived that and wow, I don't if I'll go for that again. It's a climb that something for everyone and not just people who are just interested in getting a physical work out. It has charms for people as an art object, a lot of people use Longs Peak for art, for paintings, for ceramics. In my house here I have a stained glass piece of Longs Peak. All kinds of different art works have been done about Longs Peak. People who are arm chair mountaineers and enjoy hearing about the history. People who've done the history of Longs Peak and want to share that history. I was very fortunate in getting to know a lot of those over the years. That was a gift that really opened my eyes so that when I hike up Longs Peak now I really don't just see what's going on there today. I'll look at an area like the Boulder Field and I'll look over at this one spot and I'll think very fondly to Dr. Hull Cook who was a guide there in 1931 and 1932. I'll think, "That's the two story, the site of the two story inn, where Hull Cook was a guide and had so many adventures that he told me about. Here on the ground, here's some concrete stuck to some rocks that was part of the mortar that held that hotel together. Here's a little piece of broken glass". There's history up and down that mountain and my one plea to the public and to the Park Service would be to remember to preserve that history because it dates back 11,000 years to

the early Archaic Era when prehistoric people camped at Jim's Grove and it continues to this very day.

05:09

So I really got to learn Longs Peak from a lot of different facets. My trainings is really is as a biologist. I have a doctorate in biology, specifically invertebrate zoology. I've really come to enjoy the alpine ecology, particularly above tree line, but also the stuff that goes on below tree line. I've been very blessed in having a number of interesting animal sightings up there. I've seen a wolverine at Jim's Grove in the winter. I've run into big horn sheep up there at close range. I've seen a three legged elk up there; he survived actually several years up towards the Boulder Field. I have seen a number of pine martins, I saw three young ones playing just a few years ago, running and scampering up and down the north face on some 5.15 sections without rope that none of us could ever dream of doing. I have seen pine martins actually run off with marmots and I've seen least weasels, ermine, run off with mice and pica. I've come within 10' of a mountain lion. I almost skied into her coming off of Battle Mountain in the front of Longs Peak once. I came to a sliding stop; she came to a sliding stop. She had been running. We both looked at each other for a minute and it was just an enchanted moment. I'm not sure but I think the way her tail language was with the slow waive, stands for a word that maybe has only four letters in a cat language. She just kind of looked at me and then she really didn't run off, she just kind of faded away. It was just so great of a sight; I couldn't even get my camera out in time to get a picture of her. I have come within close contact with black bear on Longs Peak and I've had to manipulate them to lead them away from people's camp sites. I still walk around corners and I find plants, I find slime molds, I find fungi that I have not seen before up there. There's a grove of ancient trees up there, one of those trees lying on the ground was probably over 4,000 years old when it died, a limber pine, one of the oldest forms of life on earth. So I still find Longs Peak a very fascinating adventure. A lot of people ask me how it was I never go board going up that same old trail. Well, I didn't see that same old trail that way and furthermore there's a lot of other old trails and different ways to go and sometimes just going up through the woods or cutting up in some different areas. Or when you are on the peak there's a lot of room for new routes. I've done six new routes and one first winter ascent. I continue to find fascination and challenge and the breath for my life that I need with Longs Peak.

08:25

Interviewer:

You mentioned preserving Longs Peak and kind of cherishing the history. You were pretty instrumental in some reunions of some of those old timers back in the early '90s, '91 and '93. How did that all start with trying to get so many people together who kind of shared this affinity for Longs Peak?

Jim Detterline: The start of the Longs Peak Reunions was a total accident. It was all due to a rainy day, it was September in 1990, and it was one of those rainy days where it's just cold and miserable outside, it's letting you know that summer's gone, autumn's here, winter is going to be here next week. It's not a pleasant time to be outside, everybody in my staff found reason to be in the ranger station. Now, in 1990 the ranger station was in that little office that's next door. I lived in that house, that's the 1927 guide's house. The ranger station was actually half of the building right now that has somewhat of a visitor's center in it. That was actually two buildings, so the older building where our office was actually had an exterior window between it and the display room next door where volunteers would sign out permits and things. So I'd often have that window open if I wanted to hear what was going on in the other room there, keep track of things. So we were all working around the office, trying to catch up on reports and these three very old men in their 80s walked in. I couldn't help it, I'm not really an eavesdropper but, these guys started telling the most incredible stories. Some of these stories I'd heard from some of the history books like "Climb Colorado", but other stories were really fantastic and I'd never heard these. I couldn't handle it anymore, so I had to walk out of the office, through the door into the next room and I said, "Forgive me for eavesdropping, it's really not like me, but who are you guys?" It turned out that it was Clarin "Zumie" Zummwalt, Dr. Hull Cook, and Ev [Everett] Long. Three of the most famous of the Boulder Field Inn guides. Boulder Field Inn was only in existence for a short time, from 1925 to 1937. At the end of that time, the demise of that operation wasn't so much the Depression but it was actually caused by the glacier that's underneath Boulder Field. You see that two story inn shifted and cracked and they had to dynamite it in 1937 because it was falling apart. So here's three of the most famous guides of all time. I'd seen their pictures in "Climb Colorado". These three crazy young guides, climbing up and down the stone walls of the cabin, wearing top hats, and all kinds of accoutrements. Here they are, they are in their 80s and they are back here in the station. Zumie tells me that I blurted something stupid out like, "Gee, I thought you guys were dead." I hope I wasn't that uncouth but I was just stunned to meet them. It began the start of a really beautiful friendship. I had to ask, I said, "Well what brings you together?" "We haven't seen each other for 40 years and we decided we'd like to come back to this place that was so special to us, cause we don't know if we're going to be able to do this anymore, we are all in our 80s now." I thought to myself, "This is a beautiful and a damn shame at the same time. It's beautiful because they are getting back together, it's a shame because there's a whole lot of people that are probably like that, that are really attached to Longs Peak and their experiences and their partners on Longs Peak. People would really like to have a thrill of meeting somebody like Zumie", like I had that day. So we came up with this idea of putting together a Longs Peak reunion. We got the blessings of the park on that, we made it into a multi-

event type of thing. We had a bar-b-q over at Lilly Lake when they still had the out building there. We had a band play for that. We had an art show. I got together with Betty Kilsdonk at the town museum and we had a special historical exhibit put up down there. Zumie and Tom Hornbein, some of the guides, actually led some hikes out from the Longs Peak Ranger Station and helped people to enjoy their knowledge of the area, even better than they would have. It all culminated in a symposium with speakers giving slide illustrated talks of what they had done. It was a complete look at this mountain in terms of its history. Significant people showed up, such as the first guys to climb the Diamond gave a presentation. Paul Stettner came and talked about the first ascent of Stettner's Ledges. His brother Joe couldn't make it but latter came to Estes Park. The three guides had their black and white photos done up into slides and showed what it was like to be a Boulder Field Inn guide. We had looks at some of the famous rescues we'd only ever heard of. For instance the most famous rescue on my mind would be that of Richard Kezlan when he fell on Lamb's Slide in January of 1968 and Dr. Sam Luce, the Park's Physician Advisor ended up doing brain surgery on him in the old Chasm Meadows Cabin, saved his life. These guys were all at this reunion and many more and we got to listen first hand to their interesting stories. Then I got to go out and I got to hike with these guys and climb with a lot of these guys. I'm not the world's greatest climber but I certainly have had the world's greatest experiences, I think in getting to meet a lot of these people who inspired my climbing.

15:00

Interviewer: Did you ever have or consider going anywhere else?

Jim Detterline: I always thought about going other places but I had a commitment to Longs Peak. I really enjoyed rangering, but the reason that I enjoyed Longs Peak so much was for Longs Peak's sake and the "Longs Peakers" as we call them. The people that are up there. I had such a commitment to them after a while, but I was just happy being at Longs Peak. I really wanted to just finish my career out there. Now unfortunately the way the Park Service is set up, you just really can't move up in the system or make a greater salary or anything like that without moving around. But for me that was ok because I really enjoyed Longs Peak so much. Unfortunately as my career went on they changed some of the basic requirements for it. I have a hearing impairment in which I have severe hearing loss. I actually wear hearing aids. In 2001 I was told that I could no longer do my job because they'd changed the medical standards and in the new standard it was illegal to accommodate your hearing with a hearing aid. So I had to go to Washington, D.C. and went through a big board meeting and a bunch of E.E.O. [Equal Employment Opportunity] activities against them. To this day there's still very much discriminatory against people who are hearing impaired. I kept my job but every year I'd have to go through this

same rigorous process, which made the job really less enjoyable. When I thought about going on to other places when things got a little more difficult here, all of a sudden I found out that now I couldn't because the waiver that they'd given me was good only for the Longs Peak job. Because the people on the board had assessed my abilities based upon my Longs Peak job and if I had tried to get a ranger job elsewhere I would need to go through an entirely separate waiver process. Since I wouldn't have had any experience with the job I was going into they would have said, "Well we can't give the job because you're not medically qualified." So in the end I had to stay at Longs Peak but I was happy to be at Longs Peak and I was really happy to serve the people that were there. Whenever things got difficult with the folks at the Headquarters and the folks in the upper Park Service echelons, I always went up Longs Peak and got myself a good breather there and it reminded me of why I was here and why I got into the Park Service in the first place.

Interviewer: Hypothetically speaking, if you would have been able to go somewhere else, do you think you really would have pursued that?

Jim Detterline: It's possible that I would have but I think my heart would have always been at Longs Peak. Even after I was forced into early retirement by the Park Service I choose to remain in this area because it was close to Longs Peak and the things that I loved.

18:34

Interviewer: What kind of a connection to the local climbing community do you feel other than just your personal very strong connections with the mountain itself, what kind of connections do you have with the other local climbers here?

Jim Detterline: This is a very tight knit climbing community. I've seen them in tragedies; I've seen them in their celebrations. They are people that are very dear to me. I don't get to climb with all of them; I certainly see them all out there. Some of them whom I've really had some big attachment to and have gotten to do some great climbs with would certainly include Dr. Tom Hornbein. I had the great honor of accompanying when he became the oldest person to climb the Diamond. Just earlier this year, 2013, in June, I actually got to second Tom on a first assent at his ripe age of 83. He's certainly been a great friend and we still share adventures. Another person I really share great admiration for is Steve Komito. Steve runs the local boot store, don't let him kid you, that's really just his employment. He's really a first rate climber and also a skier and I remember going with Steve on Sharkstooth and then descending. He insisted on not using any of the rappels and just had his way of kind of dancing down that thing somehow. He just charms me with that. Tommy Caldwell, I remember when Tommy was really just a little baby and I used to do a lot of stuff with his father Mike [Caldwell]. Mike and I shared some very difficult rescues together

including the search for Mike's colleague, the Chief Guide of the Colorado Mountain School, Brad Farnan, when Brad Farnan and Todd Martin disappeared in an avalanche on Flat Top, November 1, 1992. Mike and I were on several teams together during that very difficult search looking for a personal friend of his and a friend of mine too. I just really enjoy running into these guys. Some of these guys I get to share climbs with once in a while. Even if I don't get to share climbs with some of them they are certainly friendly and outgoing to me. They brighten my day when I see them. I continue to look forward to my next meeting with them, whether it's just a dinner or a "say hello" in the street, or hopefully get out on a climb with them.

21:37

Interviewer: It seems like there's so many really good dedicated climbers in the Estes Park area. What do you think brings those types of folks here?

Jim Detterline: These mountains. I know Longs Peak particularly was a magnet for Enos Mills and it is the reason that he really went and spearheaded the fight to establish this area and not another area of Colorado's mountains as Rocky Mountain National Park. Could have easily been anywhere else. A lot of people are attracted to the great climbs here. If you are any kind of climber at all, you have Rocky Mountain National Park on your life list. If you don't have it on your life list, you probably not any kind of climber at all. But the people that we have around here are just a really great bunch; they've all found ways to enrich their personal lives here. Some of them do just manual labor

22:43 [End of Part C.]

[D].

00.00

around here or something just so that they can get out and climb in their spare time. And other people have moved in, most of the people who are here moved in from somewhere else. They are just really dedicated to being in this area. One of my favorite climbing partners is Lisa Foster, author of the hikers guide book [Rocky Mountain National Park, The Complete Hiking Guide]. Lisa is just so inspirational as far as getting out with her on a climb or a hike, because she's just so enthusiastic about things. It's contagious like a disease. So you love to get up high with Lisa and with some of these other folks. I had the great pleasure of doing a climb on Longs Peak with Howard Burkhardt just a few months before he was killed from a tree limb that fell on him. He had a business cutting tree limbs and as he was cutting one down, unfortunately it knocked him off. But there was another great guy. There's a lot of great guys and gals in this area. My next door Bill Karam dragged me up The Diamond a couple

of years ago and just had a blast climbing with a younger climber like that who's just so powerful.

Interviewer: I think that's all I've got for today so thanks so much for your time and sharing your stories with us. It's been great, it's been awesome.

Jim Detterline: You are welcome, hope to keep having more material for stories.

01:43 [End of Part D. End of interview.]

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**ABSTRACT** - Dr. Jim Detterline should have the distinguished title of "Mr. Longs Peak". The title would be well deserved in the context of his noteworthy service as the Longs Peak Supervisory Climbing Ranger, a responsibility which spanned 21 years. In addition, Dr. Detterline has summited Longs Peak 406 times and counting and has been involved in more than 1,200 search and rescue missions, most in the Longs Peak area. Dr. Detterline describes his introduction to mountaineering, his career with the National Park Service, mentions many notable pioneer climbers of the Estes Valley area, and shares his great appreciation for the rich history of Longs Peak. Jim describes Longs Peak, with its many facets, as "a mountain that has something for everyone". That appeal and charm includes hiking, various climbing opportunities with different levels of difficulty, ice climbing, skiing, a subject for different genre of the arts, a rich variety of flora and fauna, and even an exciting place to visit for the arm chair mountaineer. Rocky Mountain National Park and all who explore the area have been especially enriched by the dedicated service of Dr. Jim Detterline.

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